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Errors pertaining to the English definite and indefinite articles and the Minimalist Program

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Errors pertaining to the English definite and indefinite articles and the Minimalist Program

استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في **اللغويات التطبيقية**.

القسم: اللغة الإنجليزية.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to:
My parents,
My brothers and sisters, and
My faithful friends.

Abdel-Salam Mohammad Al-Mashaikh

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First, I would like to express my great gratitude to my advisor, Professor Mahmoud Kanakri for his meaningful comments without whom definitely this work would not be completed. I also would like to thank Professor Hosam Mobaideen who taught me many courses and who taught me not to approve any thought except after thinking logically and not to agree with others' opinions just because they are well known or famous.

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Abdel-Salam Mohammad Al-Mashaikh

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List of Abbreviations

AP: Adjectival Phrase

Comp: complementiser

CP: Complementiser Phrase

D: Determiner

DFC: Doubly-Filled Complementiser

DP: definite phrase

GB: Government and Binding

LG: Logical Form

MP: Minimalist Program

N: noun

NP: noun phrase

PP: Prepositional Phrase

SDs: Structural Descriptions

TP: Tense Phrase

UG: Universal Grammar

XAP: extended adjectival projection

Abstract

Errors pertaining to the English definite and indefinite articles and the Minimalist Program

Abdel-Salam MO. Al-Mashaikh

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This study aimed at investigating errors pertaining to the English definite and indefinite articles and analyzing these errors within the Minimalist Program (hence MP). The researcher presented a statistical analysis of errors and presented a point of view within the MP explaining such errors. The population of the study consisted of (393) male and female students majoring in English as a foreign language at Mu'tah University in Jordan during the second semester in the academic year 2010-2011. The sample of the study consisted of (80) students (40 sophomores; 20 males and 20 females, and 40 freshmen; 20 males, and 20 females). They were purposefully selected from English majors studying for their BA. Students were given a fill in blank test which consisted of 35 items. Students were asked to choose the suitable article from (a, an, the, or zero article (x)). Then students' answers were analyzed statistically and within the MP.

To achieve the purpose of the study four hypotheses were tested:

1. Students commit more mistakes in the zero article than other articles because of the effect of their mother tongue and the differences between Arabic and English structures of definiteness.
2. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to gender.
3. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to place of living.
4. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to educational level.

Findings of the study showed that students commit more errors regarding the zero article where the percentage of error was 82% which was the highest percentage comparing it with the indefinite articles which was 60% and with the definite article (the) which was the lowest percentage of error as 44%.

الملخص

الأخطاء التي تتعلق بأدوات التعريف والتنكير في اللغة الانجليزية ونظرية البرنامج المصغر

عبدالسلام محمد المشايخ

جامعة مؤتة 2011

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء الأخطاء التي تتعلق بأدوات التعريف والتنكير في اللغة الانجليزية وتحليل هذه الأخطاء ضمن إطار نظرية البرنامج المصغر. قدم الباحث تحليلا إحصائيا لهذه الأخطاء مع التحليل من ناحية نظرية وفق نظرية البرنامج المصغر. تكون مجتمع الدراسة من (393) طالبا وطالبة من طلبة البكالوريوس في تخصص اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة مؤتة في الأردن خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني للعام 2010-2011. حيث تكونت عينة الدراسة من 80 طالبا وطالبة مقسمين كالآتي: (40 من الطلاب من السنة الأولى منهم 20 طالبا و 20 طالبة، و 40 من الطلاب منهم 20 طالبا و 20 طالبة) وتم اختيار العينة بشكل هادف وكانت عينة منتقاة. تم إعطاء الطلاب اختبار ملئ فراغ يتكون من 35 فقرة حيث أن على الطلاب أن يختاروا أداة التعريف المناسبة من بين (a, an, the, or zero article). ولقد تم تحليل إجابات الطلاب إحصائيا وضمن إطار نظرية البرنامج المصغر.

ومن اجل تحقيق هدف الدراسة تم اختبار أربع فرضيات:

1. إن الطلاب يرتكبون أخطاء في الظروف التي لا تحتاج إلى أداة تعريف أو تنكير (zero article) اكبر من الأخطاء التي يرتكبونها في استخدام أداة التعريف (the) و أداة التنكير (a/an) بسبب تأثير اللغة الأم وبسبب الاختلاف في التراكيب النحوية بين اللغة الانجليزية والعربية فيما يتعلق بالتعريف والتنكير.
2. لا توجد فروق دالة إحصائيا في نسبة الخطأ في أدوات التعريف والتنكير تعزى للجنس.
3. لا توجد فروق دالة إحصائيا في نسبة الخطأ في أدوات التعريف والتنكير تعزى لمكان السكن.
4. لا توجد فروق دالة إحصائيا في نسبة الخطأ في أدوات التعريف والتنكير تعزى للسنة التعليمية.

ولقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب يرتكبون أخطاءً فيما يتعلق بالظروف التي لا تحتاج إلى أداة تعريف (the) أو أداة تنكير (a/an) اكبر من الأخطاء التي يرتكبونها في استخدام أداة التعريف (the) أو أداة التنكير (a/an)، حيث بلغت نسبة الأخطاء في الظروف التي لا تحتاج إلى أداة تعريف أو تنكير 82% والتي كانت اكبر نسبة مقارنة مع نسبة الأخطاء في استخدام أداة التنكير a/an والتي كانت 60% ومقارنتها أيضا بنسبة الأخطاء في استخدام أداة التعريف (the) والتي بلغت 44% حيث كانت اقل نسبة في الأخطاء.

Chapter One
Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

Teaching English structures is an essential component of any pedagogical program at any university. Arab students learning English as L2 including English majors face a lot of difficulties learning English. One of these difficulties is learning and using the English definite and indefinite articles (a, an, the, or zero). These difficulties are crystal clear to most English teachers or Arab students. Many researchers conducted a number of studies on this topic; Crompton (2011) stated that mis-use of the definite article for generic reference in English is caused by L1 transfer, rather than an interlanguage developmental order. Conversely, Bataineh (2005) stated that all errors regarding English definite and indefinite articles are independent of the learners' native language, except for the deletion of the indefinite article which was attributed to the influence of Arabic.

This work investigates definite and indefinite articles within the framework of the Minimalist Program (henceforth MP). It also adopts a comparative and theoretical point of view, showing how languages (English and Arabic) express definiteness. It outlines the nature of definiteness semantically and syntactically and develops an account of which definiteness is a grammatical category represented in syntax.

There are four types of determiners in English: articles (a, an, the), demonstratives (this, that, these, those), possessives (my, your, his, her, our, their, its), quantifiers (some, much, many…). This study focuses on the first group, namely, articles (a, an, the, and zero articles). Chang (2003) divided determiners into two groups, according to the syntactic properties of [±definiteness]. The group of determiners used with definite interpretation includes the definite article, the possessive determiner and the demonstrative, whereas the other group includes the indefinite article, cardinal and quantifier determiners of indefiniteness.

1.2 Definiteness

Definite noun phrases in English are phrases that begin with (the) while indefinite noun phrases begin with a/an, bearing in mind that proper nouns do not generally need articles or determiners. The expression of definiteness varies from language to language. In their study, Avery and (Radisic, 2007:3) mentioned that Serbian has no articles, and it is characterized as a topic-prominent language and these topics are always definite. They further mentioned that "In Serbian, adjectives can, in some circumstances, be marked either indefinite or definite. However, in predicate position, they are obligatorily indefinite, despite the fact that they are modifying a definite noun." (Zlatić, 1997: 39).

(1) Grad je jako lep/*lepi.
town AUX very beautiful-INDEF/*DEF
'The town is very beautiful.'

On the other hand, (Guella, Deprez and Sleeman, 2008:63) mentioned that "In Standard Modern Arabic (SMA henceforth) noun phrases are either definite or indefinite. Noun phrases are definite (a) with the presence of the definite article (él), or (b) with the specification of a noun, i.e., the addition of another substantive to form a possessive construction (Idafa) known as the construct state, or (c) by the use of a possessive suffix. The definite article (él) precedes the noun and does not share gender and number features with the noun".

(2) a. fi él maṭ3ami
in the restaurant
'in the restaurant'
b. kitab-u él walad-i
book-nom def-art boy-gen
'the book of the boy'
c. kitaab-u-h-u
book-nom-his-masc
'his book'

Arab students learning English as a second language apply Arabic definiteness to English, thus committing terrible mistakes. For example, when they want to use the English word "water", (meaning water in general), they say: * "The water".

All definite noun phrases are referring expressions, but not every noun phrase, using the so-called 'definite article' (the), is necessarily semantically definite. In generic sentences, for example, one can find a phrase beginning with *(*the) where the hearer cannot be expected to identify the referent, often because there is in fact no referent. The expression is not being a referring expression. (Hurford and Heasley, 1983 p.73) as for instance in this sentence:
The whale is a mammal. (The noun phrase 'the whale' is not semantically definite).

1.3 Minimalist Program and Definiteness:

(Baltin and Collins 2001:348) mention that "According to Chomsky (1992,1995a), the minimalist program (MP) aims at establishing a theory of grammar for human language by postulating only minimal assumptions that are necessary and essential on conceptual grounds alone. As a consequence, there exist a few (hopefully, only one) set(s) of universal principles and a finite array of options as to how they apply (namely, parameters)". They add that "the task of the MP is to show, by utilizing these highly restricted options in UG, that the apparent richness and

diversity of linguistic phenomena is illusory and epiphenomenal and that it results from the interaction of the principle(s) and limited sets of fixed parameters".

In their book, (Baltin and Collins, 2001:349) point that "In the minimalist framework advocated by Chomsky (1992, 1994, 1995a), two linguistic levels are postulated and only those levels are assumed: they are necessary and essential for linguistic theory as interfaces with the performance systems (namely, articulatory-perceptional (A-P) and conceptual-intentional (C-I systems)".

In his book entitled, The Minimalist Program, (Chomsky, 1995:15) was concerned with the states of the language faculty, which is understood to be some array of cognitive traits and capacities which is a particular component of the human mind. He stated that "the language faculty has an initial state, genetically determined; in the normal course of development it passes through a series of states in early childhood, reaching a relatively stable steady state that undergoes little subsequent change, apart from the lexicon". He called the theory of a particular language 'grammar' and the theory of the initial state is 'Universal Grammar (UG)', which is the theory of languages and the expressions they generate. Furthermore he mentioned further that "the human brain provides an array of capacities that enter into the use and understanding of language (the language faculty); these seem to be in good part specialized for that function and a common human endowment over a very wide range of circumstances and conditions. One component of the language faculty is a generative procedure (an I-language, henceforth language) that generates structural descriptions (SDs), each a complex set of properties, including those commonly called "semantic" and "phonetic properties". These (SDs) are the expressions of the language". (Chomsky (1995:167)).

(Cook and Newson, 1996:312) stated that "the minimalist framework draws on concepts from Chomsky's late 1980s papers, such as Full Interpretation and Economy of Representation and Derivation; the principle of Full Interpretation claims that there are no redundant elements in the structure of the sentence: each element plays some role, whether semantic, syntactic, or phonological, and must be interpreted in some way. The Principle of Economy is a more general requirement that all representations and processes used to derive them be as economical as possible". They claimed that the principle of Economy leads to minimalism in that "if the linguistic system needs to be as economical as possible, in terms of both how it represents and generates structures, clearly the smallest possible set of devices to account for language phenomena should be used – the defining characteristic of the Minimalist Programme. Economy of representation requires that representations of syntactic structure contain no

more than the required elements (the principle of Full Interpretation may be a consequence of this condition".

(Cook and Newson 1996:167) mention further that "UG theory is constantly changing in ways that make it more general and more explanatory; there is always pressure to reduce principles of the grammar such as the θ-Criterion to even more basic principles. A recurrent theme in Chomsky's writing is that human language seems to be constructed to avoid superfluous elements in sentence structure". They said that, as an example, the following arithmetical statement is perfectly acceptable:

$\forall x \; 2 + 2 = 4$

despite there being a superfluous universal quantifier (∀x means 'for all Xs', where x is a variable that is superfluous to the meaning of 2+2=4). They stated that "human language does not allow such superfluous elements; an equivalent sentence in human language is ungrammatical:

*** Every the man loves the woman.**

This sentence means that the man loves the woman, with every superfluous to this meaning". In a human language the quantifier 'every' cannot be simply viewed as meaningless and ignored. So, as Cook and Newson (1996:168) mentioned, "Chomsky (1986a) proposed a principle, called Full Interpretation (FI), which states that every element that appears in a structure must be interpreted in some way, i.e. there are no superfluous elements in the structure of language".

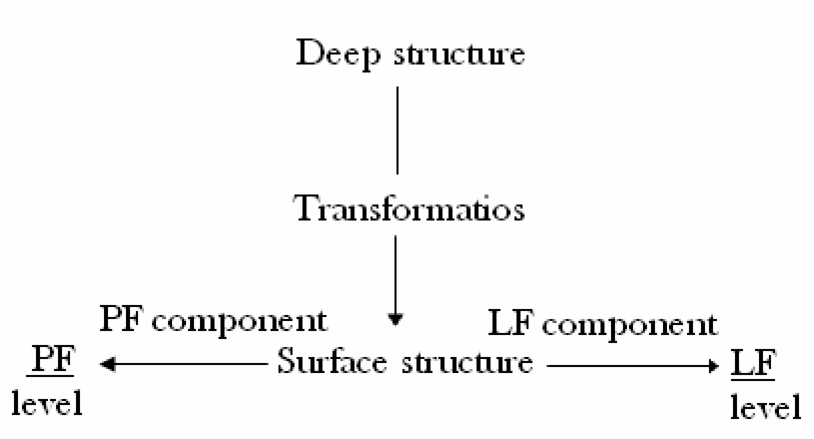
On the other hand, (Cook and Newson 1996:322-23) state the difference between minimalism and GB in that "One important difference between minimalism and GB is that, in the former, structures are built up piecemeal. In GB, D-structure was presented as a complete structure and not much was said about the internal process of how it was formed: it was an 'all-at-once operation' (Chomsky, 1993, p.21)".

(Lasnik and Uriagereka 2005:2) mention that Principles and Parameters (P&P) framework gave rise to minimalism. The lexicon and the computational system of human language (C_{HL}) are two major aspects of the classical and current theory. They mention that in the late 1960s grammars were essential sets of rules. They state that "grammars were taken to be essentially sets of rules to construct phrase-structure and manipulate it in some limited ways (transformations) to be possible rules at the time, in order to better explain how children uniformly acquire languages so rapidly, that eventually led to the general notions of principles and parameters".

From the viewpoint of the MP, one of the most important questions that arises when studying the relation between the lexicon and C_{HL} is the 'redundancy' existing between the two. It was found that a lot of the work that C_{HL} was taken to do, the lexicon was independently doing. The desire

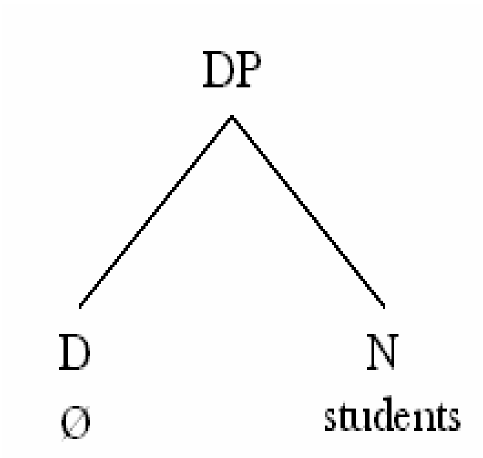
to get rid of this sort of redundancy when doing work in syntax has been a very pervasive force since the 1980s, and it is one of the most central practices in the minimalist methodology. (Lasnik and Uriagereka (2005:3)).

(Lasnik and Uriagereka 2005:7) mention further that "the traditional P&P model included the representational levels of Deep structure (which is where thematic was coded in Lectures on Government and Binding (LGB) (Chomsky 1981)), and surface structure, which served as an intermediate link between Deep structure and the interpretive (Phonetic Form and Logical Form) levels" :

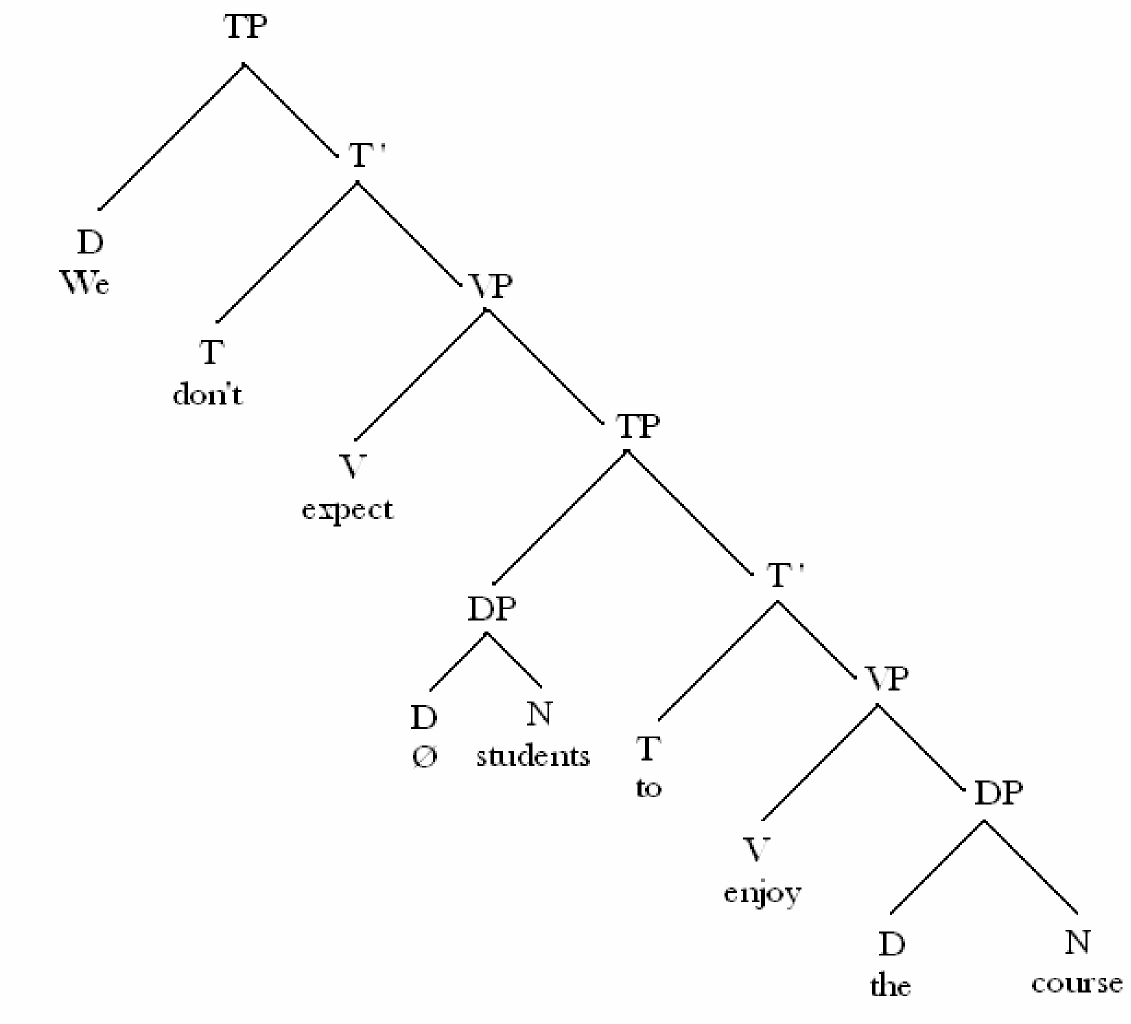


They said that "the MP eliminates levels that are irreducible to the 'conceptually necessary' claim that language interfaces sound and meaning".

(Radford 1997) mentions that nominals are projections of a head D constituent and hence have the status of D or DP constituents. In the case of bare noun expressions, these are nominals which are DPs headed by a null determiner, and that the bare noun "students" is not simply an N, but rather a DP of the form below. (Radford, 1997:95-96)



The noun "students" has a generic interpretation, and hence is interpreted as meaning 'students in general'.



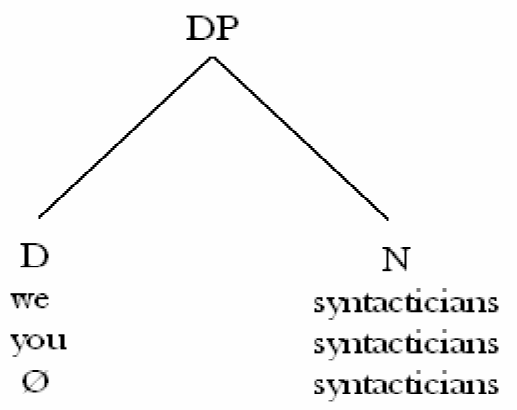
(Radford 1997:96) stated that "if bare nominals are DPs headed by a null generic/existential determiner Ø, the semantic properties of Ø determine that bare nominals will be interpreted as generically or existentially quantified".

On the other hand, Radford (1997:96-97) suggests that the null determiner Ø carries person properties, in that it is a third person determiner. He relies on the evidence from the following sentences:

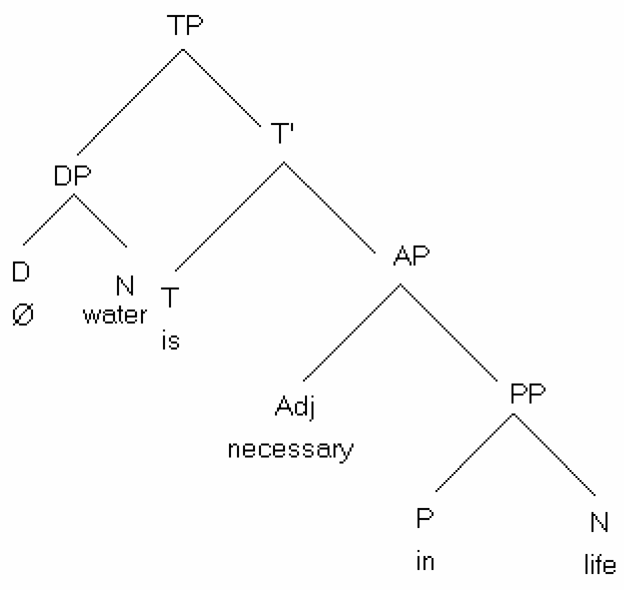
a) We syntacticians take ourselves/*yourselves/*themselves too seriously, don't we/*you/*they?
b) You syntacticians take yourselves/*ourselves/*themselves too seriously, don't you/*we/*they?
c) Syntacticians take themselves/*ourselves/*yourselves too seriously, don't they/*we/*you?

According to Radford, example (a) shows that a first person expression such as 'we syntacticians' can only bind a first person reflexive like ourselves, and can only be tagged by a first person pronoun like you. Example (b) shows that a second person expression like 'you syntacticians'

can only bind a second person reflexive like yourselves, and can only be tagged by a second person pronoun like you. Example (c) shows that a bare nominal like 'syntacticians' can only bind a third person reflexive like themselves and can only be tagged by a third person pronoun like they. Thus the nominals (we / you) syntacticians) in the previous examples are DPs of the form below:



Following Radford, when students use the definite article (the) before the word "water" (meaning water in general) in "The water is necessary in life", the result will be ungrammatical. Rather it should be "Water is necessary in life".



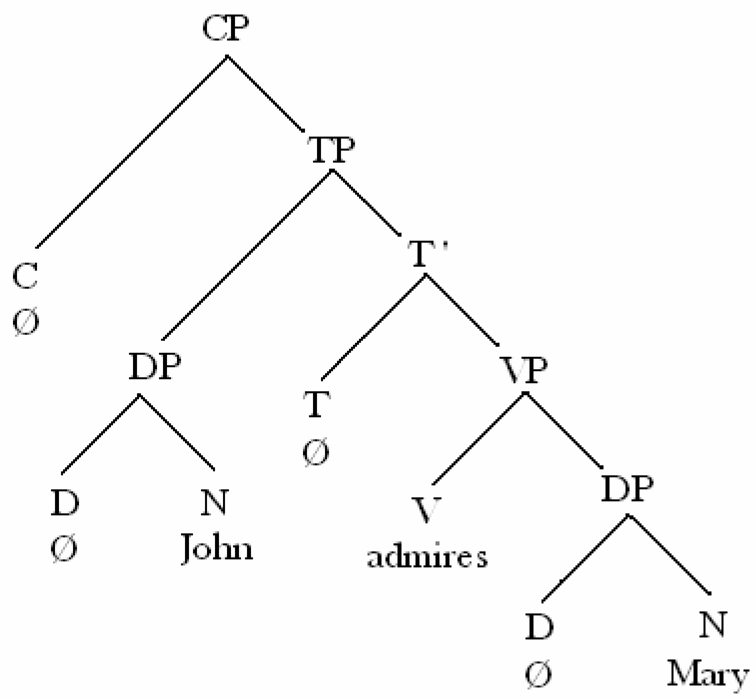
(Burkhardt, 2008:68) focuses on Lobner's approach to definiteness, which proposes a two-way distinction between semantic and pragmatic definites. He mentions that "Semantic definites exisit (relatively) independent of the particular situation of utterance, while pragmatic definites must be specified by information made available by the immediate situation for unambiguous reference (cf. also Hawkins 1978).

Exemplars of semantic definites are proper names (e.g. Hillary Clinton) or inherently definite nouns (e.g. the weather), which have the same denotation in every possible world and thus refer unambiguously in and of themselves. Yet, indexicals (I, you) also belong to the class of semantic definites, since they have a limited referential scope and unambiguously identify their referents (speaker and hearer respectively) within a particular situation. In contrast, the majority of definite NPs (e.g. the apple), third person pronouns and demonstratives belong to the class of pragmatic definites, whose reference must be specified by contextual information that varies from situation to situation". (Burkhardt, 2008:76) states that "the concept of definiteness is not restricted to the occurrence of the definite determiner and that definiteness goes beyond morphosyntactic encoding". He relied on the findings from pronouns, as well as the observation that the presence or absence of a definite determiner has no significant impact on the interpretation of proper names.

In support of Burkhardt's claim on proper names in that they are definite, (Radford, 2006:82) discusses under the DP hypothesis that bare definite noun expressions are DPs. He states that "a name like John is a referring expression which denotes a specific/definite individual in precisely the same way as a DP such as this/that/the boy does". He gave an example as a piece of empirical evidence in support of analyzing bare nouns as DPs:

John and the chairman are attending a meeting.

He mentioned that "the fact that a bare noun like John can be co-ordinated with a determiner phrase/DP like the chairman provides us with empirical evidence that bare nouns must be DPs".



(Hinterwimmer 2008:28) mentions that according to Berner regarding indefinites singular and bare plurals "if these items are contained within adverbially quantified sentences, they often do not have existential force either (while they get existential interpretations in episodic sentences). Their quantificational force also seems to depend on the quantificational force of the Q-adverb in the same clause". She provided these examples as an evidence:

These two examples are interpreted the same as in 'Many dogs are smart'

a. A dog is often smart.
b. Dogs are often smart.

These two examples are interpreted with the same as in 'All dogs are smart'

a. A dog is always smart.
b. Dogs are always smart.

1.4 Problem of the Study:

Jordanian learners of English encounter various problems concerning how to select or use the correct definite, indefinite or zero articles (a/an, the, zero article). Students sometimes misuse articles with a number of noun phrases. For example:

* I bought book.
I bought a book.

(I will discuss in Chapter Four under the Minimalist Program why such a sentence, bare singular noun, is ungrammatical in English).

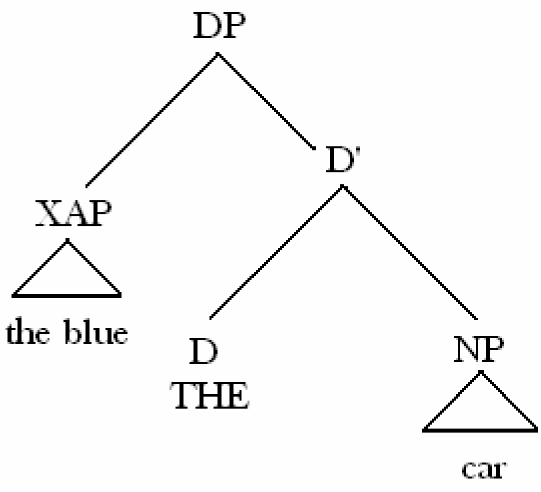
On the other hand, students sometimes produce double definite articles in their performance of English and this may be the effect of their mother tongue. Following (Leu, 2008), "a familiar restriction on pronunciation is the so-called Doubly-Filled-(Comp) Filter (Chomsky and Lasnik, 1977; Koopman, 1997a). Given the large fine-grained structures of the cartographic tradition (Cinque, 2002; Rizzi, 2004; Belletti, 2004), it may be possible to generalize the DFC to all projections". Leu stated that "The presence of an overt definite marker is responsible for the phonetic absence of a (hypothesized) second definite marker further to the right". (Leu, 2008)

Generalized \Doubly Filled Comp Filter":

No projection has both an overt specifier and an overt head at the end of the derivation, (Koopman and Szabolcsi, 2000, p.4):

The blue car.
The blue THE car. (silent elements are represented in capital letters)
* The blue the car

(Leu, 2008) states that the pre-adjectival definite marker is part of the extended projection of the adjective (XAP) and licenses the non-pronunciation of the definite article in D':



1.5 Purpose of the Study:

The major objective of the study is to discuss and analyze within the Minimalist Program and the SPSS the errors or mistakes that pertain to English definite and indefinite articles that Arab students commit in writing or speaking English. Since definite and indefinite articles are common in writing English, I decided to investigate the problems and the structural facts regarding using them in writing within MP.

1.6 Hypotheses of the Study

This study endeavors to test the following hypotheses:

5. Students commit more mistakes in the zero article than other articles because of the effect of their mother tongue and the differences between Arabic and English structures of definiteness.
6. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to gender.
7. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the place of living.
8. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the educational level.

Chapter Two
Review of Literature

In this chapter I will review some relevant literature. The studies in this chapter have been arranged chronologically.

2.1 Studies Related to the Definite and Indefinite Articles

In his study, (Kharma, 1981) examined the errors committed by his Arab students in the use of the English definite articles. Kharma's results revealed that the majority of errors occurred in the use of "the" instead of "no articles". Some of these errors were attributed to Arabic interference, others to wrong learning strategies or overgeneralization. Many error analysis studies are conducted after researchers had noticed that students generated a large number of errors in the syntax of articles.

(Al-Qasem, 1983) investigated syntactic and lexical interference errors attributed to Arabic as exhibited in the English writing performance of 60 freshmen, 60 sophomore English majors and 60 senior English majors at Yarmouk University. The results show that there are significant differences between freshmen and senior English specialists in the following syntactic errors: the definite article, prepositions, and relativization, whereas there were no significant differences regarding the definite article between freshmen and sophomore.

(Zaghlool, 1984) investigated the errors committed by 180 Jordanian secondary male and female students in the city of Mafraq. The students were randomly selected from four secondary schools, two for boys and two for girls. He classified the errors into four major categories: substitution, overuse, omission and insertion. As a result, the researcher attributed lexical errors to the following causes: lexical borrowing, translation from Arabic, overgeneralization, incomplete acquisition of lexemes, phonetic similarity, lack of knowledge, performance, and developmental errors.

In his study, (Saleem, 1991) investigated the errors in the English definite and indefinite articles committed by 500 ninth grade students, 250 males and 250 females. As a result, the findings showed that there were differences between the definite and indefinite articles, between the definite and zero article and between the indefinite and zero article according to the test as used by the ninth grade students. On the other hand, there are differences between male and female students according to the use of definiteness by the ninth grade students. The researcher ascribed these errors to: mother tongue interference, overgeneralization, and ignorance of grammatical rules.

In her study, (Bataineh, 2005) analyzed compositions written by 209 Jordanian first-, second-, third- and fourth-year university EFL students at Yarmouk University. She identified nine types of errors: (1) deletion of the

indefinite article, (2) writing *a* as part of the noun/adjective following it, (3) substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, (4) substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, (5) substitution of a for an, (6) use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, (7) use of the indefinite article with marked plurals, (8) use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and (9) use of the indefinite article with adjectives. She concluded that all errors, except for one, are independent of the learners' native language. She mentioned that the only type of error which could be traced back to the influence of Arabic, among other sources, was the deletion of the indefinite article.

In his study, (Tawalbeh, 2006) examined the effect of colloquial Jordanian Arabic on learning the English definite article and negation. The sample of the study consisted of (100) male students and (100) female students who are tenth graders in the borough of Kerak. These students were given two tests: a translation test which consisted of twenty-five sentences to be translated from Arabic into English, and a fill-in-blank test which consisted of thirty sentences where students were asked to choose the suitable article (a, an, the or zero article) and then fill it in the blank given. Findings of the study showed that school students committed more transfer errors in their use of the English negation and definite article than committing other types of errors where the percentage of transfer errors in negation was 52% and the percentage of transfer errors in the use of the English definite article was 20% in the translation test. Furthermore, in the fill-in-blank test the percentage of transfer errors in the use of the definite article was the highest; it reached 39% of all other types of errors committed in the use of the English article system. The study also showed that there are statistically significant differences due to the gender variable in the percentage of transfer errors committed in the use of negation and the definite article. Male students committed more transfer errors in the use of negation than female students while female students committed more transfer errors in the use of the English definite article than male students.

(Hinterwimmer, 2007) tackles the conditions under which singular definites and universally quantified DPs receive interpretations according to which the sets denoted by the NP-complements of the respective determiner vary with the situations quantified over by a Q-adverb. He showed that "in both cases such interpretations depend on the availability of situation predicates that are compatible with the presuppositions associated with the respective determiner, as co-variation in both cases comes about via the binding of a covert situation variable that is contained within the NP-complement of the respective determiner", and he offered an account for the observation that "the availability of a co-varying interpretation is more constrained in the case of universally

quantified DPs than in the case of singular definites, as far as word order is concerned". (ibid: 39)

In his study, (Abu-Jarad, 2008) examined the errors generated by 179 English major students registered in the second semester 2005 in Al-Azhar University – Gaza, in a grammar test comprising 59 questions covering 13 problematic grammatical categories. The sample was randomly selected from the four levels of the English department, the female students constitute 65% of the subjects of the study and the male students constitute 34%. The results of the statistical analysis revealed that there is a natural development in the students' control of the grammatical items tested as the students move to the upper levels. However, it has been discovered that there is a gap at the third level, where the grammar teachers should review tenses, articles, and comparatives before they get into the contents of the grammar course. First level students have shown good results on the test due to the efforts they exerted while preparing for the High School General Certificate Exams. The analysis has also shown statistically significant differences related to gender, where the male's performance percentage in the test was 25.29, and the female's performance was 28.97.

In her study about the interlanguage development of articles in English as a second language, (Stehle, 2009) investigated the development of six learners, three Arabic speakers whose L1 has articles and three Chinese speakers whose L1 does not. Short spontaneous speeches by two groups of learners over the course of a year were used to see if the learners' L1 affects their development. Articles were examined in the context of the noun phrase in which they appear and the countability of the noun phrase was also considered. The result shows that Arabic speakers were more accurate in their use of the and Ø, but the Chinese were more accurate with a and an. The researcher ascribed this to the fact that Arabic has a definite article while Chinese does not.

In their study, (Dabaghi and Tavakoli, 2009) investigated the effect of error correction on EFL learners' acquisition of some grammatical features; and the effect of errors on definite and indefinite articles and errors on regular and irregular past tense verb forms. Data of the study were collected from 56 intermediate level students of English as a foreign language in Iranian private language school settings. Each participant was required to read and then retell a written text in their own words through an oral interview. During or following the interview, the examiner provided the participants with immediate explicit, delayed explicit and immediate implicit corrective oral feedback on their grammatical errors. They mentioned that "A comparison was made between the learners' scores on the test items that measured definite and indefinite articles as well as regular and irregular past tense forms in order to assess the impact of corrective feedback on these linguistic features." The results regarding

definite and indefinite articles showed that when corrective feedback is given, the definite article 'the' is learned before indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'. They claimed that "this finding lends support to the arguments put forth by of Krashen (1977), Andersen (1978), and Dietrich, Klein and Noyau (1995) that confirmed the role of negotiation as well as the role of saliency and individualized attention in language learning" (Dabaghi and Tavakoli, 2009: 90). They mentioned further that the results of the study have some implications for both second language acquisition and language pedagogy.

(Al-Momani, 2010), investigated the structure and derivation, and the properties of direct object relative clauses in Jordanian Arabic (JA) within the minimalist program. The researcher concluded that "the relative complementizer ?allaðii, inflected for person, number, gender and case manifestation in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), gets so impoverished as it reduced to ?illi (and its phonological variants) in JA. He stated that the relation between heads of direct object relative clauses and the relative complementizer ?illi is argued as a reflection of definite/indefinite dichotomy. The study offers an account for the obligatoriness of resumption observed in the case of direct object relatives in JA. The gap/resumption alternation found in the definite direct object relativization in MSA never exists in JA and hence, resumption is necessary for feature-checking purposes." (Al-Momani, 2010: 226)

In her study, (Atay, 2010) investigated the second language acquisition by 120 Turkish students from three groups of learners at different proficiency levels (40 elementary, 40 intermediate, and 40 upper-intermediate students) in order to find out the role of certain semantic universals of the Universal Grammar, specificity and definiteness, during the acquisition process. She used a forced-choice elicitation task to collect data. The task consisted of 40 short and contextualized dialogues that belong to four different contexts; i.e. definite/specific, definite/non-specific, indefinite/specific and indefinite/non-specific. The participants were asked to fill gaps with an appropriate article; a/an, the or zero on the bases of their understanding of the proceedings context. The results showed that intermediate level learners exhibited fluctuation between definiteness and specificity to a great extent in (+definite/-specific) and (-definite/+specific) contexts, whereas elementary level learners were more accurate in these contexts, exhibiting article omission errors in definite contexts, and upper intermediate level students were quite successful in article assignment in defined contexts. As a result, the researcher stated that there is a positive correlation between article system acquisition and proficiency.

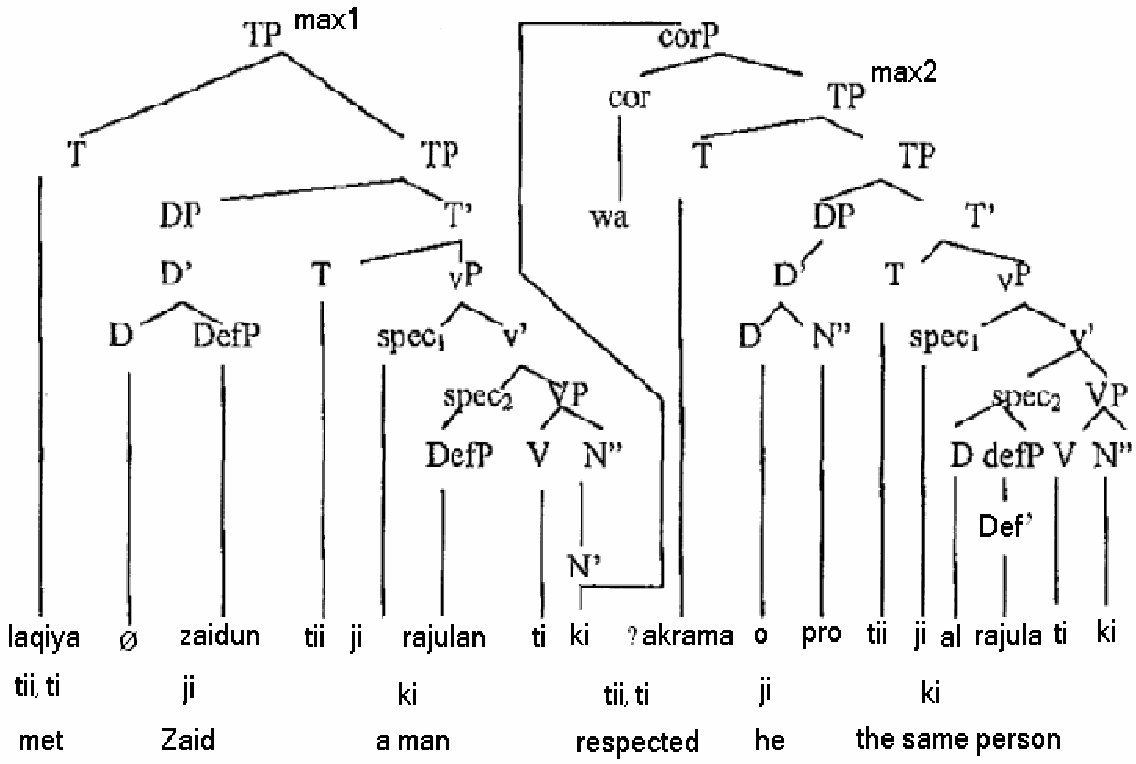
In his study, (Al-Sulmi, 2010) investigated errors in the use of definiteness and indefiniteness of 24 male students at the third grade in the

English Language Department at Qassim University. He examined whether Arabic interference significantly exerts its influence over the learning of English articles, leading Saudi learners to commit errors, or whether the other learning strategies stand out as chief sources of these errors. The subjects were given a diagnostic test consisting of 70 dialogues, and they were asked to select either a, an, the, or zero article to complete the sentence. After completing the test, the subjects were asked to comment on their answers, providing the reason for selecting the item they chose. As a result of his study, Al-Sulmi stated that the bulk of errors are attributable to learning strategies, rather than Arabic interference. He claimed that Saudi learners of English were rarely disposed to Arabic influence, while they were remarkably influenced by the operation of learning strategies (overgeneralization and developmental strategies).

In his study, (Crompton, 2011) investigated article system errors in a corpus of English writing by tertiary-level L1 Arabic speakers. He compared the frequencies of articles with those of native English and non-native English speaker corpora and found that the commonest errors involve mis-use of the definite article for generic reference. The researcher argued, by a comparison of the forms of generic reference in English and Arabic, that these errors are caused by L1 transfer, rather than by an interlanguage developmental order. He suggested that even for learners of English with mother-tongues which have an article system, say Arabic, L1 transfer may be a problem and as such could be usefully addressed in language instruction.

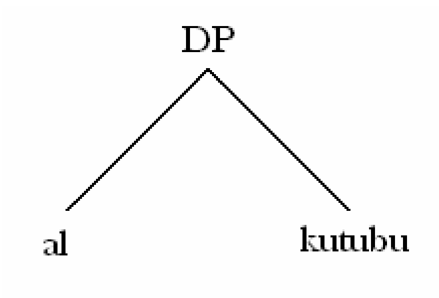
2.2 Studies related to the English and Arabic definite and indefinite articles within the Minimalist Program

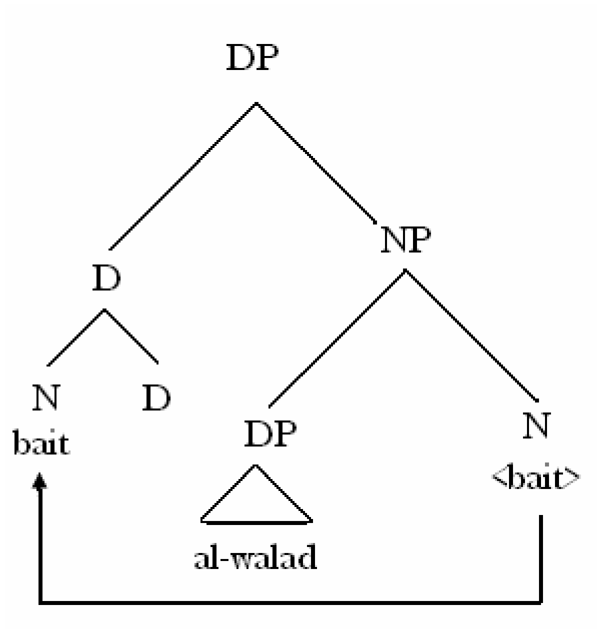
In his study, (Jalabneh, 2004) investigated the specific syntactic and semantic properties of the article 'al' in Arabic within the minimalist program of Chomsky, and he examined the categorial features of D at the interface and LF whether they are strong or weak. He attempted to formulate a sub-articulated functional feature of D (DefP), and explored the configurational and functional features of exophoric and endophoric in Arabic syntax. He focused on the connection between D and the nominative structural case insofar as the type of features was concerned. As a result, he argued that D is the right position for T to check case.



In her study, (Bardeas, 2009) provided a minimalist account of the Arabic DP. She collected data from Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Meccan Arabic (MA), a spoken variety used in Saudi Arabia. She argued that head-to-spec movement takes place in all Arabic DPs, and that this movement is a cyclic minimalist alternative to standard Head Movement. She claimed that the basic differences between Simple DPs and Free States, on the one hand, and Construct States (Idafa), on the other, are derivable from the D projected in each structure; definite or indefinite D are projected in the former and Construct State D in the latter. She also analysed Construct States headed by a number of categories: nouns, quantifiers, nominalised adjectives, numerals and verbal nouns, and she claimed that the similarities between these constructs are due to the use of Construct State D, and the special behaviour of each type is a reflection of the category of the head projected below D.

Simple DP in (MSA)	Construct State in (MA)
al-kutubu	bait al-walad
the books(m-p-nom)	house(m-s) the boy(m-s)
"the books"	"the boy's house"





(Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007), in their book which is a study of the aspects of morphosyntax of the noun phrase (the projection of the noun) offered a survey of a number of key issues on the syntax of nominal projections within the generative tradition. They mentioned that "an article can be used when the definite article indicated a noun in a general function (e.g. the horse is an animal); an individual stands here for a whole class." (Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007: 98).

Chapter Three
Methodology

This study aims at investigating the real causes of errors of English relevant to definite and indefinite articles and whether Arabic interferes with learning them. In this chapter, the researcher presents a description of the design of the study including subjects, data collection, limitations of the study, validity and reliability of the test and the procedure.

3.1 Participants:

For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected a sample of 80 students; (40 sophomores; 20 males and 20 females, and 40 freshmen; 20 males, and 20 females), enrolled at Mu'tah University during the second semester of the academic year 2010-2011. They were purposefully selected from English majors studying for their BA.

3.2 Instrument:

In order to compile enough corpus for the sample to be analyzed, the students participating in this research were asked to sit for a test that required filling the suitable article (a, an, the or zero article). Evidence for the analysis was gathered through filling in the blank test. The test includes 28 sentences containing 35 gaps. Gaps number (5, 7, 8, 11, 46, 19, 21, 27, 30, 32) require the use of the indefinite article (a). Gaps number (13, 23, 29) require the use of the indefinite article (an). Gaps number (2, 6, 17, 18, 22, 24, 28, 31) require the use of the definite article. Gaps number (1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 20, 25, 33, 34, 35) require the use of the zero article. The test resulted in many mistakes. For example, in the first gap, a few students, namely five, chose the definite article (the), and four others chose zero article, while 68 students chose the indefinite article (a), where it should be the zero article instead:

*** The man told the doctor that he was having a trouble.**

In gap number 4, 46 students chose the definite article (the) and only 17 of them chose the zero article where the latter should be used:

*** The penguins cannot fly.**

In gap number 14, 47 students made a mistake choosing the indefinite article (an) before the adjective 'innocent' instead of zero article:

*** I am quite sure that he is an innocent.**

In gap number 16, approximately half of the participants, namely 38, chose the correct choice which is the indefinite article (a) while 17 students chose the definite, and 19 chose zero article:

*** He is always lucky guy.**

In gap number 19, 50 students chose the correct article which is the indefinite article (a), whereas 12 chose the definite article, and 12 chose (a), and eight students chose (an).

*** There is the philosopher available. .**

In gap number 20, 56 of the participants chose the definite article instead of the zero article:

*** What do you usually have for the breakfast?**

In gap number 34, most students, namely 51, chose (the) instead of the zero article whereas 12 chose the indefinite article (a), and only 15 students chose the zero article which is the correct answer.

*** New Zealand's the most important exports are meat and wool.**

3.3 Test Validity:

The test validity was ensured by giving it to a jury of judges specialized in English language. Three professors were from the English language literature department at Mu'tah University, and two professors were from the faculty of education at the same University. The jury was asked to add, delete and modify any of the test items and to ensure the appropriateness of the test for the two levels of the participants to measure the ability of them to choose the appropriate article from a, an, the, or zero article.

3.4 Test Reliability:

The reliability of the test instrument was ensured by conducting a pilot study of 80 students who were excluded from the sample. The test was given twice to the same students with a time interval of two weeks. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated of the results and it was 85.7 % which is considered reliable.

In this study, (SPSS) analysis was used to analyze and discuss the corpora of the study.

3.5 Procedures of the Study:

First of all, the researcher got a permission to distribute the test among to the participants being involved in this study. The test was given on 80 students, but three of them did not answer it. The subjects were informed that the test was not an evaluation test but it was for research purposes. Thus, they can do it freely. They were told to read each sentence then choose the appropriate article from (a, an, the, or zero article). It took the participants 7 to 10 minutes to complete it. The researcher did not pay much attention to the indefinite article (an) whereas the researcher focused on the indefinite article (a), since both of a/an are in the same category, and that the researcher does not want to take up the errors related to consonants

and vowels as onsets of words. Though there are sentences in the test that may lead the participants to use the indefinite article (an), such as "I am quite sure that he is innocent". In the test, the researcher dealt with gaps, not sentences, as questions. So the researcher gave every gap a mark, since there are sentences in the test containing more than one gap.

It took the researcher two days to distribute the test among all the participants as it was really very hard to meet with not female English students; besides some of them did not accept to take the test. Then, all of the tests were analyzed to find out whether there was a relationship between the participants' personal information and their responses, and to find out the real causes of mistakes committed in the test. To classify the types of errors, the researcher went through the participants' responses following the footsteps of (Tawalbeh, 2006) as follows:

1- Omission errors: errors committed when students delete the definite article in contexts where its use is obligatory. For example, the second gap in the test "He decided to go once again to the same address and to find the person who is the owner of the wallet" requires the use of the definite article before the word 'same'. In this case and other similar cases, if students use a/an, or zero article, the error is classified as an omission error.
2- Substitution Errors: errors committed when students substitute the use of (a) for (an), or vice versa, or the use of a/an for zero article, or vice versa. For example, the twenty-third gap "Ahmad's father works as an electrician" requires the use of the indefinite article (an). In this case and other similar cases, if the students use (a) or zero article, the error is then classified as a substitution error.
3- Transfer Errors: errors committed when students use the definite article in contexts where it should not be used, where a/an, or zero article should be used instead. For example, gap number 19 in the test "There is a philosopher available" requires the use of the indefinite article (a). In this case and other cases, if students use the definite article, the error is then classified as transfer error.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

Three main variables were taken into account in this study: educational level, gender, and place of living. Gender was the only difficult variable to measure, since the majority of freshmen and sophomores were females.

Chapter Four
Findings and Discussions

This chapter presents a statistical analysis of the data being collected from the fill-in-blank test which was given to the sample of the study. It also presents an analysis of errors within the Minimalist Program, the researcher presents a theoretical point of view within the Minimalist Program, and discuss the errors related to the English definite and indefinite articles within MP.

4.1 Findings Related to the First Hypothesis:

The first hypothesis in this study was: students commit more mistakes in the zero article than other articles because of the effect of their mother tongue and the differences between Arabic and English structures of definiteness. To test this hypothesis, SPSS was used to count the percentage of error of the populations of the study. Students' responses were corrected and analyzed based on the instrument of the study. Students' error percentage regarding the definite article (the) was 44%, and regarding the indefinite articles a/an was 60%, whereas the highest percent of errors was in the zero article which was 82%.

Table (1)

Percentage of incorrect responses regarding the definite article (the).

Item	Gender		Place of living		Educational level	
	Male	Female	Middle	South	Freshman	sophomore
2	15.8	37.7	24.2	29.5	45.0	7.9
6	23.7	32.5	15.2	38.6	27.5	28.9
17	26.3	30.0	33.3	25.0	42.5	13.2
18	47.4	50.0	51.5	47.7	47.5	50.0
22	31.6	35.0	33.3	34.1	37.5	28.9
24	31.6	42.5	24.2	47.7	47.5	26.3
28	23.7	20.0	21.2	22.7	27.5	15.8
31	50.0	72.5	57.6	63.6	75.0	47.4

Table (1) shows that regarding gender, males' incorrect responses were lower than females' in all items that relate to the definite article (the) whereas the percentage of females' error was higher than males' in items 2, 6, 24 and 31. Regarding place of living variable, students who live in the middle were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses to only item 17, whereas students who live in the south were higher in their incorrect responses to items number 2, 6, 24, and 31. The researcher believes that according to the analysis, students who live in the middle were lower in their incorrect responses due to the environment; it seems that they are more interested in studying than students who live in the

south. Regarding the educational level, freshmen were higher in their incorrect responses than sophomores in items number 2, 17, 22, 24, 28 and 31. It is clear from the analysis that sophomores showed more correct responses using the English articles than freshmen and this is because they had taken more courses in English than freshmen.

It is clear from table (1) that item (31) had the highest percentage of males' incorrect use of the definite articles as 50.0, whereas item (2) had the lowest percentage of males' incorrect responses as 15.8. and regarding females, item (31) had the highest percentage of incorrect responses as 72.5, whereas item (28) had the lowest percentage of incorrect responses as 20.0. For more illustration, here are the items that had the highest and lowest percentage of error with respect to gender:

2- * He decided to go once again to (2)same address and to find the person who is the owner of the wallet.

23- Speaker B: Yes, * (28) party was great!

26- General Motors set its engineers to work in 1972 on * (31) production of a more efficient and competitive car which would challenge the foreign imports.

Students' false answers to the use of definite article were of omission error type. These are examples of students' false answers in the use of the definite article:

6- * (6) Weather is threatening to ruin our holiday.

14- * You should submit your project at (17) an office.

15- * I fixed (18) an engine yesterday. The car runs really smooth now.

19- * (22) Dinner they served was delicious.

21- This is * (24)a best doctor in * (25) the hospital.

Students' false responses to the definite article were the lower percent comparing it with zero and indefinite articles and this is because it is easy for students to use the definite article than to omit because of their mother tongue.

Items number 2, 6, 18, 22 and 28 require the use of the definite article. It is obvious from the context that the noun phrase 'same address' is known to both to speaker and hearer. The noun 'weather' in the sentence 'weather is threatening to ruin our holiday' indicates the state of the weather at that time and not 'weather' in general. The noun 'dinner' in 'dinner they served was delicious' refers to a specific meal shared by both the speaker and hearer.

Regarding item number 18, the sentence 'I fixed the engine yesterday. The car runs really smooth now', the noun phrase 'the car' is definite as well as cars being known to have engines. Therefore, the noun 'engine' should refer to an entity, that is, it should be definite.

Items number 24 and 25 in:

*This is a best doctor in the hospital.

The first one should be filled with the definite article since syntactic properties of the NP are important for article selection, and the premodifier of the noun 'doctor' is the superlative adjective 'best', so there is a strong preference for the definite article (the). The second one should be filled with no article, since the names of institutions should not generally be preceded by an article.

We can explain the results with respect to the variable of gender by saying that half of males' responses to item (31) was incorrect because students use articles in English similar to that in Arabic, and some of males' responses to item (2) was incorrect because it is known to most students that the word 'same' should be preceded by the definite article.

With respect to the place of living variable, Table 1 shows that item (31) had the highest percentage of incorrect responses of students who live in the middle as 57.6, whereas item (6) had the lowest percentage of incorrect responses as 15.2. Regarding students who live in the south, item (31) had the highest percentage of incorrect responses whereas item (28) had the lowest percentage.

Finally, regarding the definite article and due to the educational level variable, item (31) had the highest percentage of freshmen's incorrect responses as 75.0, whereas items (6) and (28) had the lowest percentage of incorrect responses. Regarding sophomores and with reference to the same variable, item (18) had the highest percentage of incorrect responses as 50.0, whereas item (2) had the lowest percentage as 7.9.

Table (2)

Percentage of incorrect responses regarding the indefinite article a.

Item	Gender		Place of living		Educational level	
	Male	Female	Middle	South	Freshman	Sophomore
5	73.7	85.0	72.7	86.4	82.5	76.3
7	52.6	60.0	51.5	59.1	65.0	47.4
8	63.2	77.5	69.7	70.5	65.0	76.3
11	44.7	55.0	39.4	59.1	45.0	55.3
16	50.0	57.5	39.4	65.9	60.0	47.4
19	31.6	45.0	33.3	43.2	37.5	39.5
21	55.3	60.0	63.6	54.5	67.5	47.4
26	78.9	85.0	48.8	79.5	85.0	78.9
27	23.7	27.5	27.3	25.0	27.5	23.7
30	42.1	42.5	42.4	43.2	50.0	34.2
32	76.3	97.5	87.9	88.6	87.5	86.8

Table (2) shows that regarding gender, females' incorrect responses were higher than males' in items number 5, 7, 8, 11, 16, 19, 32 that relate to the indefinite article (a), and regarding place of living, students who live in the middle were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses to

only item number 21, whereas students who live in the south were higher in their percentage of incorrect responses to items number 5, 11, 16, 19 and 26. Regarding the educational level, freshmen were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses to items number 7, 16, 21, 26, and 30, whereas sophomore were higher only in items 8 and 11.

It is clear from Table (2) and with respect to gender, item (26) had the highest percentage of males' incorrect responses of the indefinite article (a) as 78.9, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage as 23.7. Regarding females, item (32) had the highest percentage of error as 97.5, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage of error as 27.5.

With respect to the place of living variable, Table 2 shows that item (32) had the highest percentage of error of students who live in the middle as 87.9, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage of error as 27.3. Regarding students who live in the south, item (32) had the highest percentage of error as 88.6, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage of error as 25.0.

Now it is clear that students had difficulty with item (32) and less difficulty with item (27).

Finally, regarding the indefinite article (a) and due to the educational level variable, item (32)had the highest percentage of freshmen's incorrect responses as 87.5, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage of error as 27.5. Regarding sophomores within the same variable, item (32) had the highest percentage of error as 86.8, whereas item (27) had the lowest percentage as 23.7.

Students' wrong answers to the use of the indefinite article (a) were of transfer and substitution error types. These are examples of students' wrong answers in the use of the indefinite article (a):

1- * He stands to loose (5) fortune.

7- * It's difficult to find true friends. When you find (7) true one, hold him with both hands.

8- * Grudges are waste of (8) the perfect happiness.

10- * Dogs bark when they see (11) stranger.

13- * He is always (16) lucky guy.

16- * There is (19) the philosopher available.

18- * Ali was appointed (21) chairman.

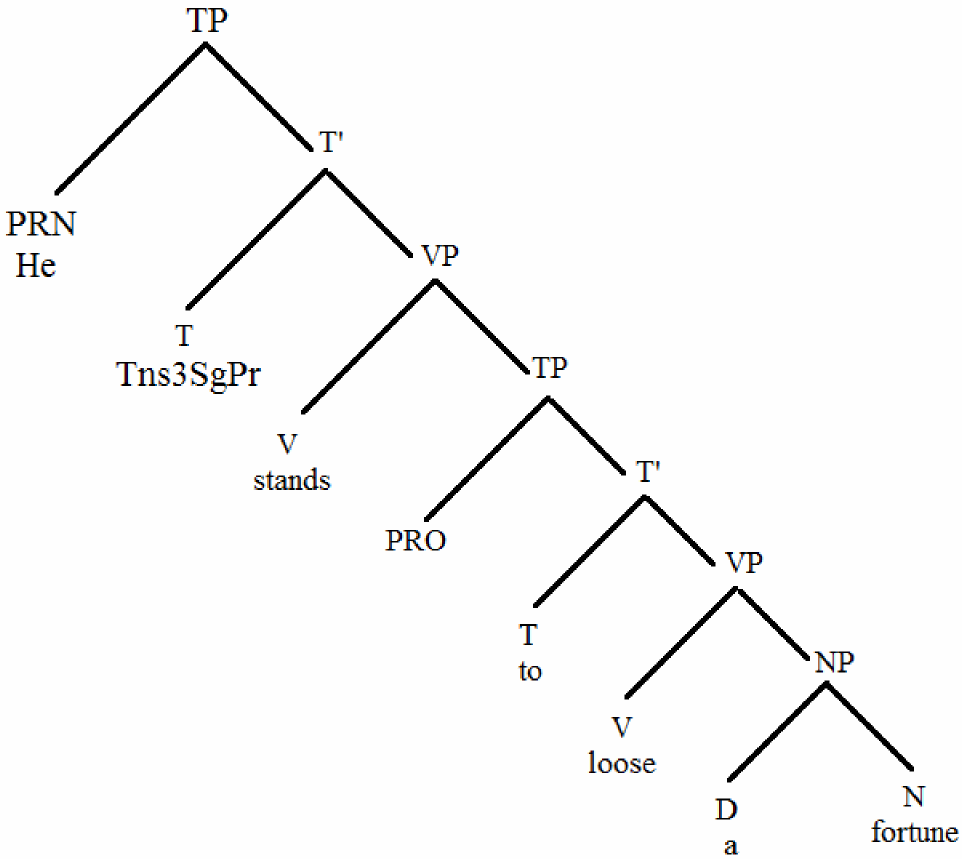
22- * (26) knowledge of English is needed for employment.

23- Speaker A: * Did you have (27) good time?

25- * Ahmad won (30) million dollars last week.

The sentences 'He stands to loose fortune', 'It's difficult to find true friends. When you find true one, hold him with both hands' and 'Dogs bark when they see stranger' are ungrammatical because the nouns 'fortune, true one, and stranger' lack articles. (Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007:164).

mentioned that "a bare singular count noun can neither appear in object position nor in subject position"



Some students committed mistakes omitting the article before the noun 'chairman' in 'Ali was appointed chairman'. (Alexiadou et al. 2007:68) mentioned that nouns, alongside verbs, adjectives and prepositions can function as predicative heads, in that they can assign theta-roles:

The students elected John president.

(The noun president in the example above assigns a theta role (theme) to John).

The noun 'president' is a predicative head and is not as a rule accompanied by an article. This example shows that singular countable nouns used as predicates do not necessarily need an article. As arguments, though, singular countable nouns do require an article. They added that indefinite DPs can function as arguments and as predicates.

John is a doctor.

*John is doctor.

They called Mary a thief.

*They called Mary thief.

(Alexiadou et al, 2007: 69) mentioned further that "In particular, we refer to (Stowell, 1989) and to (Higginbotham, 1985) for the discussion of data which show that nominal predicates can, and, in some cases, even must, be preceded by the indefinite article and for a number of

explanations. The existence of such cases is shown by these authors not to invalidate the general claim that noun predicates do not need the article, rather the presence of the (indefinite) article with such nouns, is accounted for on independent principles/grounds".

Many students committed a mistake omitting the indefinite article before the noun 'knowledge' in:

*Knowledge of English is needed for employment.

(Han et al. 2006) mentioned that the presence of a complement of the NP can override a lexical factor. Even uncountable nouns can take an indefinite article if there is a prepositional phrase (PP) complement.

Some students committed a mistake using the definite article in the expletive there-sentence 'There is the philosopher available.' where the indefinite article (a) should be used instead. (Fernald, 2000: 14) mentioned that "Milsark proposed that nominals can be given a "weak" (or cardinal) construal, or a "strong" (or quantificational) construal. Some determiners are necessarily construed weakly, some are necessarily construed strongly, and some can be construed either way. Milsark showed that strong construals are ungrammatical in the pivot (a nominal expression follows a form of (be) in the existential construction) of the existential construction, and that weak ones are grammatical. Weak determiners include a, some, number determiners, and what Milsark argued was a null determiner appearing with bare plurals and mass nouns when they have a non-universal (or non-generic) reading. Strong NPs contain determiners that are definite or quantificational. Bare plurals and mass terms with a generic reading are strong."

There was a horse available.

*There was the horse available.

There were rabbits all over the yard.

Felser and Rupp (2001) mentioned that Lasnik adheres to Chomsky's (1991, 1993) view that 'there' is an LF affix which must be attached to an appropriate host. Lasnik adds the condition that the associate host must be partitive (non-specific indefinite). They stated that this condition successfully rules out definites as they do not carry partitive case.

Table (3)

Percentage of incorrect responses regarding the indefinite article (an).

Item	Gender		Place of living		Educational level	
	Male	Female	Middle	South	Freshman	Sophomore
13	60.5	65.0	66.7	59.1	62.5	63.2
23	73.7	82.5	75.8	79.5	75.0	81.6
29	47.4	52.5	42.4	54.5	57.5	42.1

Table (3) shows that regarding gender, females' percentage of incorrect responses was higher than males in items number 13, 23 and 29.

Regarding place of living, students who live in the middle were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses to item number 13, whereas students who live in the south were higher in the percent of their incorrect responses to item 29. Regarding educational level, freshmen were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses in item 29, whereas sophomores were higher in item 23.

It is clear from Table (3) that with respect to gender and regarding the indefinite article (an), item (23) had the highest percentage of males' incorrect responses as 73.7, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage of error as 47.4. Regarding females, item (23) had the highest percentage of error as 82.5, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage of error as 52.5.

With respect to the place of living variable, Table (3) shows that item (23) had the highest percentage of error of students who live in the middle as 75.8, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage of error as 42.4. For those students who live in the south, item (23) had the highest percentage of error as 79.5, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage of error as 54.5. Finally, regarding the indefinite article (an) and due to the educational level variable, item (23) had the highest percentage of freshmen's incorrect responses as 75.0, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage of error as 57.5. Regarding sophomores, item (23) had the highest percentage of error as 81.6, whereas item (29) had the lowest percentage as 42.1.

Students' wrong answers to the use of the indefinite article (an) were of transfer and substitution error types. These are examples of students' wrong answers in the use of the indefinite article (an).

13-* Silence could be sometimes (13) a/the answer.

20- * Ahmad's father works as (23) electrician.

24- * Peter has (29) aunt in Berlin.

These sentences are analyzed under the analysis of the zero article.

Table (4)

Percentage of incorrect responses regarding zero article.

Item	Gender		Place of living		Educational level	
	Male	Female	Middle	South	Freshman	Sophomore
1	100.0	90.0	100.0	9.1	95.0	94.7
3	89.5	80.0	87.9	18.2	82.5	86.8
4	78.9	77.5	69.7	15.9	75.0	81.6
9	73.7	82.5	81.8	75.0	85.0	71.1
10	86.8	72.5	81.8	77.3	87.5	71.1
12	78.9	77.5	81.8	75.0	90.0	65.8
14	92.1	75.0	84.8	81.8	87.5	78.9
15	65.8	62.5	60.6	65.9	62.5	65.8
20	92.1	85.0	84.8	90.9	85.0	92.1
25	94.7	95.0	97.0	93.2	97.5	92.1
33	84.2	80.0	78.8	84.1	80.0	84.2
34	86.8	75.0	84.8	77.3	80.0	81.6
35	92.1	75.0	87.9	79.5	90.0	76.3

Table (4) shows that regarding gender, males' percentage of incorrect responses was higher than females' in items number 1, 3, 10, 14, and 20, whereas females' percentage was higher than males' only to item number 9. Regarding place of living, students who live in the middle were higher in the percentage of their incorrect responses to items number 1, 3, 9, 12, 34 and 35, whereas students who live in the south were higher in items number 15, 20, and 33. Regarding educational level, freshmen were higher than sophomores in the percentage of their incorrect responses to items number 9, 10, 12, 14 and 35, whereas sophomores were higher in items number 4 and 20.

Table (4) also shows that with respect to gender and regarding zero article, item (1) had the highest percentage of males' incorrect responses as 100.0, whereas item (15) had the lowest percentage of error as 65.8. Regarding females, item (25) had the highest percentage of error as 95.0, whereas item (15) had the lowest percentage of error as 62.5. With respect to the place of living variable, Table (4) revealed that item (1) had the highest percentage of error of students who live in the middle as 100.0, whereas item (15) had the lowest percentage of error as 60.6. For those students who live in the south, item (25) had the highest percentage of error as 93.2, whereas item (1) had the lowest percentage of error as 9.1. Finally, regarding zero article and due to educational level variable, item (25) had the highest percentage of error freshmen's incorrect responses as 97.5, whereas item (15) had the lowest percentage as 62.5. Regarding sophomores, item (1) had the highest percentage of error as 94.7, whereas items (12) and (15) had the lowest percentage of error as 65.8.

Students' wrong answers in the use of zero article were of transfer error type. These are examples of students' wrong answers in the use of the zero article:

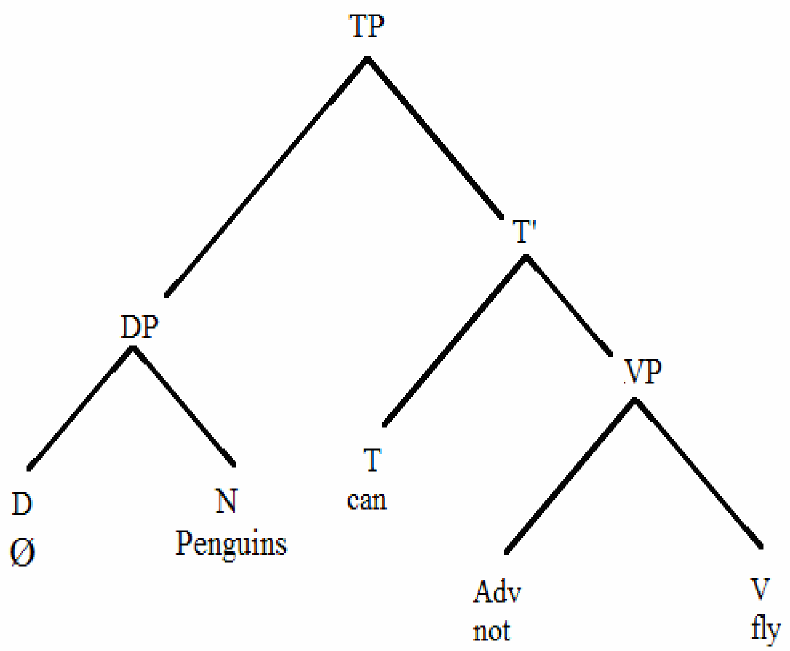
1- * The man told the doctor that he was having (1) a trouble with his feet.
3- I saw a tall woman and (3) *the/a man yesterday.
4- * (4) The penguins cannot fly.
9- * Believe me, (9) the life is too short to be unhappy.
10- * (10) The dogs bark when they see a stranger.
11- * (12) The silence could be sometimes an answer.
12- * I am quite sure that he is (14) an innocent.
13- * **Speaker A:** Ahmad won the lottery. He was (15) a lucky.
17- * What do you usually have for (20) the breakfast?
21- * This is the best doctor in (25) the hospital.
26- * General Motors set its engineers to work in 1972 on the production of a more efficient and (33) a competitive car which would challenge the foreign imports.
27- * New Zealand's (34) the most important exports are meat and wool.

28- * Call everybody now. [35] The dinner is ready.

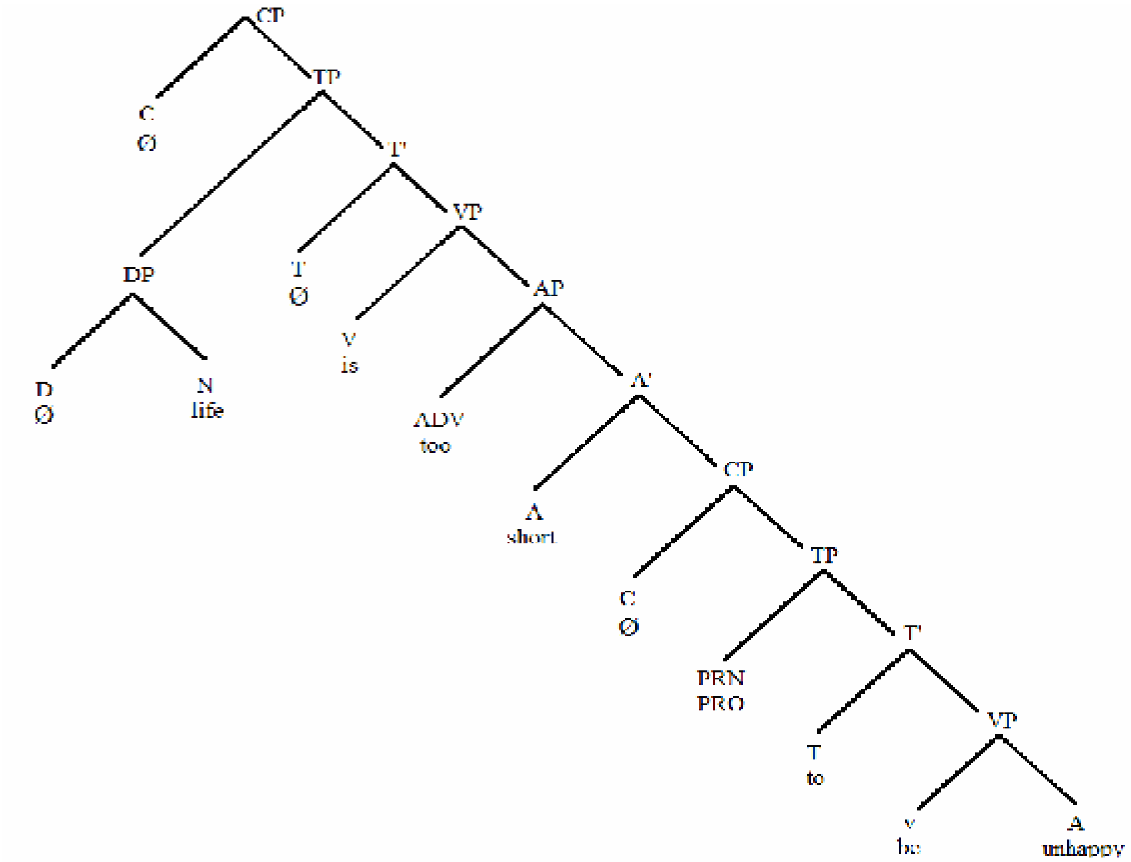
(Hinterwimmer, 2008:29) in her book entitled Q-Adverbs as selective binders quoted (Diesing, 1992) saying that "bare plurals are open expressions that introduce free variables which are restricted by the respective nominal predicate".

According to (Radford, 1997:96) "bare nominals are DPs headed by an empty determiner", thus students made mistakes using an article before gaps number 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 35.

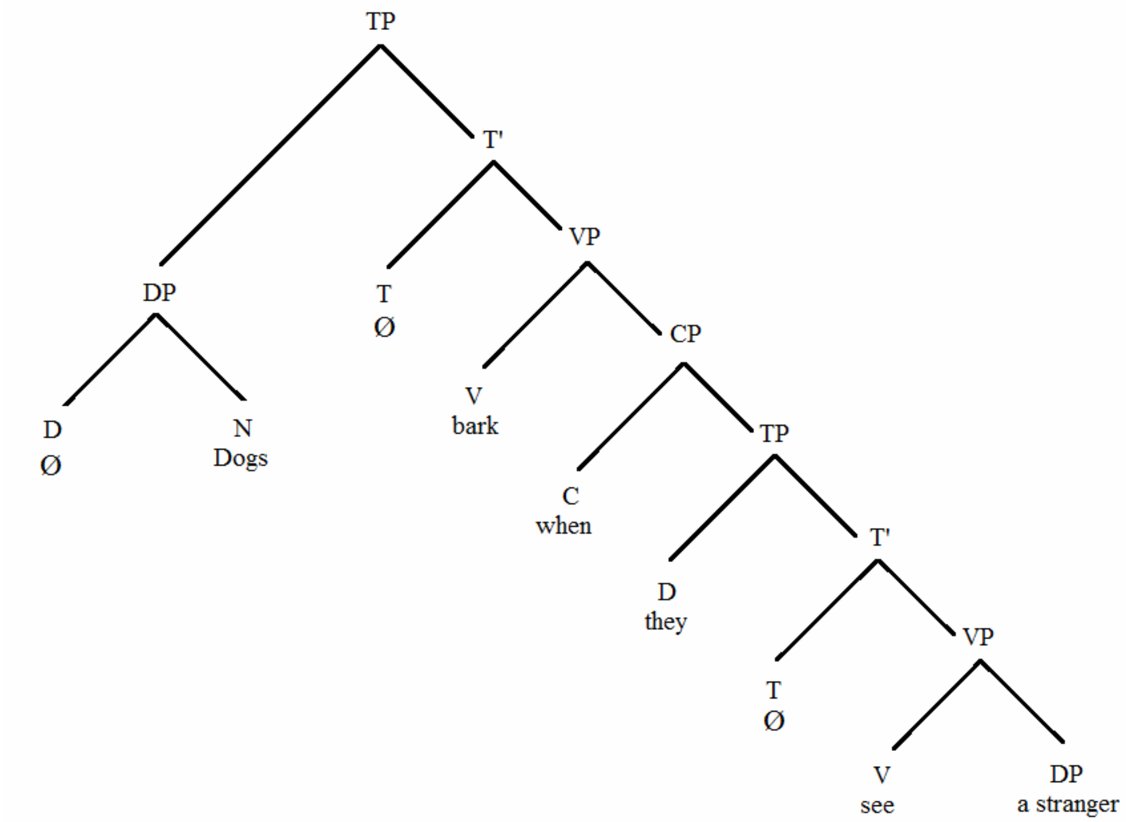
* The penguins cannot fly. (meaning penguins in general)



* Believe me, the life is too short to be unhappy.



* The dogs bark when they see a stranger. (meaning dogs in general)



The bare plural 'dogs' means some dogs, or a number of dogs, the noun is interpreted existentially. The sentence thus asserts the existence of some number of dogs that gathered in a particular place.
Alexiadou et al. (2007) mentioned that according to Carlson (1977), "the existential reading of bare plurals is attributed to an existential sentential operator. Crucially, this operator is involved in the interpretation of the sentence as a whole and is not part of the BP itself".

Cats are around.

They (2007:178) mentioned further that "the bare plural 'cats' cannot have a generic reading because the predicate ‘be around’ expresses a temporary, transitory property and as a result it cannot be used to make a generic statement about the totality of cats. This means that in this example cats cannot be interpreted generically. (Carlson, 1977) calls predicates such as ‘be around’ ‘stage-level’ predicates. Stage-level predicates are contrasted with individual-level predicates. Stage-level predicates denote non-permanent properties (states or activities), that is, properties such as ‘giving birth’, ‘laying the table’, writing’, ‘being ill,’ etc. Individual-level predicates denote permanent and enduring properties/states, that is properties such as ‘having four legs’, ‘being mortal’, ‘being tall’, etc. Individual-level predicates give rise to generic readings of BPs":

Cats are the masters of their humans.

With respect to singular non-mass nouns, (Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007:63) stated that "Being specifiers, articles were seen as optional elements of the nominal projection. However, it doesn't take long to realize that optionality cannot be taken for granted, as the ungrammaticality of the bare singular count noun in the following examples strongly suggest":

*Cat arrived last night.

A/the cat arrived last night.

*He found cat on doorstep.

He found a/the cat on his/the doorstep.

They explained that examples above shows that "singular count nouns cannot routinely occupy thematic positions (e.g. be subjects or objects of verbs) unless they are subordinated under the article. So, in view of these facts the presence of an article appears to be indispensible with noun phrases that function as arguments of verbs".

But they (2007: 216) stated that "the expletive article also encountered before singular non-mass nouns in English (Longobardi, 1994: 650):

a. The lion has four legs.

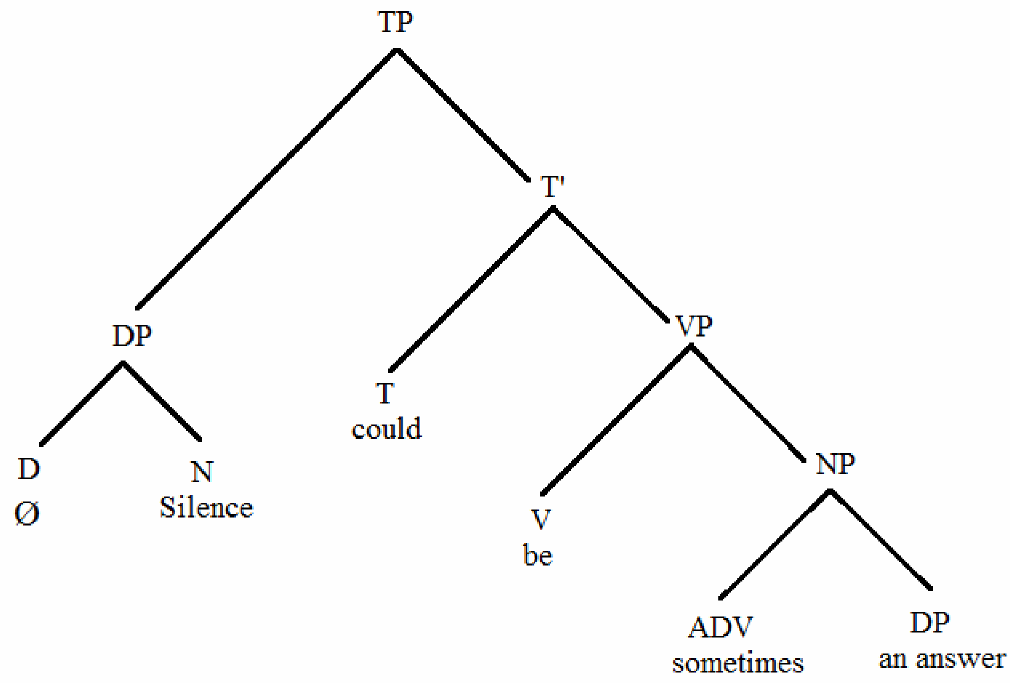
b. *Lion has four legs.

c. Lion is no good to eat.

these examples show that the non-mass interpretation of the singular noun 'lion' cannot be encoded by an empty D. Longobardi explains this rather unexpected fact by postulating the last resort (if no synonymous raising derivation is available) nature of the expletive article (1994: 653)"

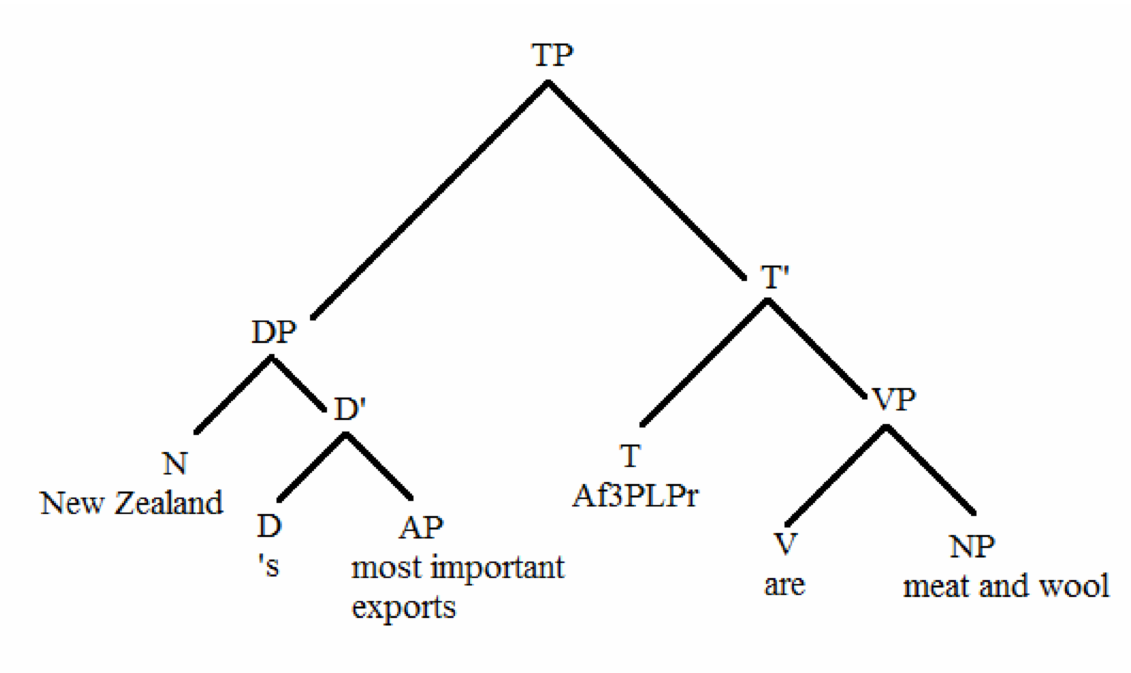
(Radford, 1997:96) mentioned that "(Chomsky, 1965, p.108) suggests that the noun sincerity in a sentence such as 'Sincerity may frighten the boy' is premodified by a null determiner". This is the same with as: 'Silence could be sometimes an answer'.

* The silence could be sometimes an answer.

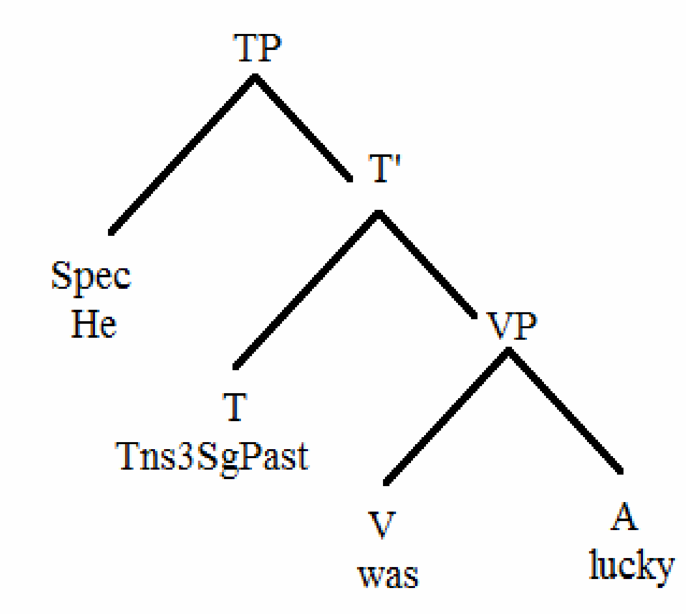


Regarding item number 34 (see Table 4), students made mistakes using the definite article after possession. (Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007) mentioned that "According to earlier versions of X' theory (Jackendoff 1977), NP was taken to be a single (endocentric) projection of N. Its leftmost specifier position was taken to be occupied by a number of different elements such as articles, demonstratives, possessive NPs, possessive adjectives and interrogative pronouns. The basic reason for grouping of all these elements was the fact that in English they cannot co-occur; in other words they have the same distribution". They give an example, * John's the book/ *the John's book. Thus, this sentence is ungrammatical:

* New Zealand's [(34)] the most important exports are meat and wool.



Some students committed mistakes using the indefinite article (an) before adjectives in "I am quite sure that he is an innocent.", and in "Ahmad won the lottery. He was a lucky". The two words 'innocent' and lucky' are predicative adjectives, so they do not need to be preceded by an article whereas if they are followed by a noun, then an article should be used.



It is important to draw attention to what (Alexiadou, Haegeman and Stavrou, 2007) mentioned; when we refer to the predicative position, or to predicative adjectives, what is meant is the appearance with the copula of an adjective or an adjective phrase as such – i.e. not as part of a noun phrase in predicative usage. So in this terminology "famous" is predicative in (i) but not in (ii):

(i) Oscar is famous.
(ii) Oscar is a famous cat.

(Bhat, 1994: 107) stated that "Adjectives used as predicates characterize the referents of their arguments, rather than the reference (or meaning) of their head nouns, and because of this particular change in their function in a sentence, they tend to lose some of their categorical characteristics." cf

(i) The lawyer is criminal.
(ii) He is a criminal lawyer.

4.2 Findings Related to the Second Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis in this study was: there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to gender. To test this hypothesis the researcher counted the means and standard deviations of error percentage for each article (a, an, the and zero article). The following table shows this:

Table (5)
Means and standard deviations of error percentage of definite and indefinite articles due to gender.

Article	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
The	Male	38	0.31	0.25
	female	40	0.4	0.26
A, an	Male	38	0.55	0.18
	Female	40	0.64	0.17
Zero article	Male	38	0.85	0.15
	Female	40	0.79	0.18

To know if there are statistical significance differences, T-test was used for independent samples, the following table shows this:

Table (6)
T-test results of transfer errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to gender.

Article	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance
The	1.52	76	0.13
A, an	2.16	76	0.03
Zero article	1.78	76	0.08

Table 6 shows the following:

There are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding the use of definite article (the) with respect to gender variable, where the statistical significance was (0.13) which is higher than alpha ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding zero article due to gender, where the statistical significance was 0.08 which is higher than the standard significance (0.05)
The hypothesis that is related to the indefinite article (a, an) was rejected because it was proved that there are statistical significance differences where the statistical significance was (0.03) which is lower than (0.05), where females' errors percentage is higher than males'.

4.3 Findings Related to the Third Hypothesis:

The third hypothesis in this study was: there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to place of living. To test this hypothesis, the researcher counted the means and standard deviations of errors of each article (a, an, the, zero article) as the following table shows this

Table (7)

Means and standard deviations of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to place of living.

Article	Place of living	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
The	South	45	0.38	0.29
	Middle	33	0.33	0.21
A, an	South	45	0.62	0.19
	Middle	33	0.57	0.16
Zero article	South	45	0.82	0.19
	Middle	33	0.83	0.16

To know if there are statistically significant differences, t-test was used for independent samples as the following table shows this

Table (8)

Results of t-test of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the place of living.

Article	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance
The	0.93	76	0.36
A, an	1.15	76	0.26
Zero article	0.38	76	0.70

It is shown from the table above that there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to place of living, where the statistical significance for t-values of definite and indefinite articles was higher than (0.05).

4.4 Findings Related to the Fourth Hypothesis:

The fourth hypothesis in this study was: there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to educational level. To answer this, the researcher counted the means and standard deviations of each article (a, an, the, zero article) as the following table shows:

Table (9)

Means and standard deviations of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to educational level.

Article	Educational level	Mean	Standard deviation
The	Freshman	0.44	0.27
	Sophomore	0.27	0.21
A, an	Freshman	0.62	0.17
	Sophomore	0.57	0.18
Zero article	Freshman	0.84	0.15
	Sophomore	0.80	0.19

To know if there are statistical significant differences, t-test was used for independent samples as the following table shows this:

Table (10)

Results of t-test of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to educational level.

Article	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance
The	2.97	76	0.004
A, an	1.2	76	0.23
Zero article	1.1	76	0.27

It is shown from table (10) that:

There are no statistical significant differences of errors regarding the indefinite articles (a, an) due to educational level.

There are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding zero article due to educational level.

There are statistical significant differences of errors regarding the definite article (the) due to educational level where freshmen's error percentage was higher than sophomore's error percentage.

Chapter Five
Summary and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

All languages handle definiteness differently. Some languages have articles while others do not. English and Arabic have different structures of definiteness. Definiteness is a very complicated structure that many students encounter. Many students do not know exactly when to use the suitable article from (a, an, the, or zero), and this is due to the lack of knowledge of English. Students in this study committed several errors in the fill-in test. These errors were of transfer error type because of the effect of their mother tongue.

In the current study four hypotheses were tested. These are:

1. Students commit more mistakes in the zero article than other articles because of the effect of their mother tongue and the differences between Arabic and English structures of definiteness. The results of the study supported this hypothesis. Students involved in the current study committed 82% of errors regarding the zero article, and 60% of errors were of the indefinite articles a/an, whereas the lowest percent of errors were 44% regarding the definite article (the).
2. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to gender. The results of the study supported this hypothesis with respect to the definite and zero articles. Where it has been shown that there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding the definite article (the) due to gender, where the statistical significance was (0.13) which is higher than alpha ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). There are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding zero article attributed to gender, when the statistical significance was 0.08 which is higher than the standard significance (0.05), but the hypothesis that is related to the indefinite article (a, an) was rejected because it was proved that there are statistical significance differences when the statistical significance was (0.03) which is lower than (0.05), when females' errors percentage was higher than males'.
3. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the place of living variable. The results of the study supported this hypothesis as there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the place of living. Where the statistical significance for t-values of definite and indefinite articles was higher than (0.05).
4. There are no statistically significant differences of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles due to the educational level veriable. The results of the study supported this hypothesis with respect to the indefinite articles a/an and zero articles as there are no statistical

significant differences of errors regarding the indefinite articles (a, an) due to the educational level. Furthermore, there are no statistical significance differences of errors regarding zero article due to educational level. But there are indeed statistical significant differences of errors regarding the definite article (the) due to the educational level where freshmen's error percentage was higher than sophomore's error percentage.

5.2 Recommendations of the study:

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following points:

1. Students should practice English in daily life, not only dealing with language as solid structures, because dealing with definiteness depends on context in many situations.
2. English teachers should encourage students to use language in their dialogues and to give them indirect feedback of errors committed regarding definite and indefinite articles.
3. English teachers should encourage students to write short paragraphs focusing on definite and indefinite articles.
4. Further research can look for more causes of errors regarding definite and indefinite articles
5. Further research can look for more constraints within Minimalist Program that restrict using definite and indefinite articles to look into the deep structure of sentence in English.

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Appendix (I)
Instrument of the study

1. The man told the doctor that he was having (1) _____ trouble with his feet.
2. He decided to go once again to (2) ____ same address and to find the person who is the owner of the wallet.
3. I saw a tall woman and (3) ____ man yesterday.
4. (4) ___ penguins cannot fly.
5. He stands to loose (5) ____ fortune.
6. (6) ____ weather is threatening to ruin our holiday.
7. It's difficult to find true friends. When you find (7) ___ true one, hold him with both hands.
8. Grudges are waste of (8) ____ perfect happiness.
9. Believe me, (9) ____ life is too short to be unhappy.
10. (10) ____ dogs bark when they see (11) ___ stranger.
11. (12) ____ silence could be sometimes (13) ___ answer.
12. I am quite sure that he is (14) ____ innocent.
13. **Speaker A:** Ahmad won the lottery. He was (15) ____ lucky.

Speaker B: He is always (16) ___ lucky guy.

14. You should submit your project at (17) ____ office.
15. I fixed (18) ____ engine yesterday. The car runs really smooth now.
16. There is (19) ______ philosopher available.
17. What do you usually have for (20) ____ breakfast?
18. Ali was appointed (21) _____ chairman.
19. (22)____ dinner they served was delicious.
20. Ahmad's father works as (23) ____ electrician.
21. This is (24) _____ best doctor in (25) ____hospital.
22. (26) ____ knowledge of English is needed for employment.
23. **Speaker A:** Did you have (27) _____ good time?

Speaker B: Yes, (28) _____ party was great!

24. Peter has (29) ____ aunt in Berlin.
25. Ahmad won (30) _____ million dollars last week.
26. General Motors set its engineers to work in 1972 on (31) ___ production of (32) ____ more efficient and (33) ____ competitive car which would challenge the foreign imports.
27. New Zealand's (34) ______ most important exports are meat and wool.
28. Call everybody now. (35) _______ dinner is ready.

Appendix (II)
Model answers of the test

1. The man told the doctor that he was having (1) __x___ trouble with his feet.
2. He decided to go once again to (2) __the__ same address and to find the person who is the owner of the wallet.
3. I saw a tall woman and (3) __x__ man yesterday.
4. (4) _x__ penguins cannot fly.
5. He stands to loose (5) __a__ fortune.
6. (6) __the__ weather is threatening to ruin our holiday.
7. It's difficult to find true friends. When you find (7) _a__ true one, hold him with both hands.
8. Grudges are waste of (8) __a__ perfect happiness.
9. Believe me, (9) __x__ life is too short to be unhappy.
10. (10) __x__ dogs bark when they see (11) _a__ stranger.
11. (12) __x__ silence could be sometimes (13) _an__ answer.
12. I am quite sure that he is (14) __x__ innocent.
13. **Speaker A:** Ahmad won the lottery. He was (15) __x__ lucky.

Speaker B: He is always (16) _a__ lucky guy.

14. You should submit your project at (17) __the__ office.
15. I fixed (18) __the__ engine yesterday. The car runs really smooth now.
16. There is (19) ___a___ philosopher available.
17. What do you usually have for (20) __x__ breakfast?
18. Ali was appointed (21) __a___ chairman.
19. (22)__the__ dinner they served was delicious.
20. Ahmad's father works as (23) __an__ electrician.
21. This is (24) __the___ best doctor in (25) __x__hospital.
22. (26) __a__ knowledge of English is needed for employment.
23. **Speaker A:** Did you have (27) ___a__ good time?

Speaker B: Yes, (28) ___the__ party was great!

24. Peter has (29) __an__ aunt in Berlin.
25. Ahmad won (30) __a___ million dollars last week.
26. General Motors set its engineers to work in 1972 on (31) __the_ production of (32) __a__ more efficient and (33) __x__ competitive car which would challenge the foreign imports.
27. New Zealand's (34) ___x___ most important exports are meat and wool.
28. Call everybody now. (35) ____x___ dinner is ready.

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